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Title : BEHAVIOR OF BOTTLENOSE DOLPHINS (*Tursiops truncatus*), IN THE PATOS LAGOON ESTUARY, RS, BRAZIL.

Category : Behavior

Student : B.A./B.S.

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Abstract : The bottlenose dolphin, *Tursiops truncatus*, is one of the world's best known cetaceans. However, there are few studies on their natural behavior along the Brazilian Coast. This study aimed to describe and quantify the behavior of *T. truncatus* in the Patos Lagoon Estuary, RS, southern Brazil (ca. 32°09'S, 52°05'). The study area was divided into three subareas according to proximity to the estuary mouth. The behavioral data were gathered every 5 minutes following the Focal Group Sampling approach. A total of 34 boat surveys were conducted from December 2001 through January 2003, totaling 56h30min of direct observation and 457 records. The first 15 minutes of each group encounter were discarded to avoid influence of boat approach on the behavior. The most observed behavior was feeding (34.35%), followed by traveling (25.82%), travel feeding (25.82%), socializing (8.97%), milling (3.93%) and resting (1.09%). There was not a significant difference among the frequencies of feeding, traveling and travel feeding (t-Test for proportions). It was detected a dependence between the type of behavior and the season of the year in subareas I ($p < 0.001$; Pearson's χ^2) and II ($p = 0.037$; Pearson's χ^2). It was also observed an association between the type of behavior and the subareas ($p < 0.001$; Pearson's χ^2). Regarding group size, 43.76% of the activities recorded were carried out by groups of 1 to 3 dolphins, 40.91% from 4 to 6, 14.22% from 7 to 10, and just 1.11% by groups with more than 10 dolphins. This study confirmed the importance of the Patos Lagoon Estuary for the dolphins to display their daily activities.